

Exercise the couch potato in your child

By Lt. Col. Dave Witkowski
Special to American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON — “Daddy, can I please play video games?”

How often do you hear this question or a similar one in your household? If the answer is “Too often,” then join millions of parents who are in a quandary about what to do with kids who have too much time and energy on their hands.

A brief history: We have two young boys ages 7 and 8. C.J., the younger, is content to play outside riding his bicycle, playing with his toy trucks and cars or just playing in the dirt. He also helps mom and dad wash the car, mow the lawn or shovel snow. In short, he can wear us and himself out in the course of a day and at the same time get plenty of exercise.

Matt, on the other hand was Mr. Couch Potato. He was content to watch Saturday morning cartoons until the afternoon and then play video games the rest of the day. He would not waste a heartbeat on physical activity on the weekend without a fuss.

This changed sort of by accident. The same “accident” can happen in your household and with as much or as little effort as you want to expend. It started when a friend encouraged us to get our children involved in organized youth sports.

At first, there were awkward moments meeting other parents and children, many of whom were old pros at this sort of thing. But Matt and C.J. quickly warmed up to soccer and T-ball. Suddenly, the boys watched less TV and played fewer video games.

So at what age should you get your overactive, underexercised youngster into youth sports?

According to experts at the du Pont Hospital for Children, children should be at least 7 or 8 to engage in organized team sports.

Many team sports are contact sports, and most little children are not ready for heavy contact.

These same experts agree that 8- to 12-year-olds are ready for competitive contact sports. These sports include baseball, softball, basketball, football, field hockey, ice hockey, soccer and wrestling.

Parents should make it a point to be well-informed about their children’s sports, including the proper protective gear the kids need and injury protection techniques.

Experts do not recommend young children use free weights, weight-training equipment or distance running.

Pediatricians say children should be able to perform the following activities between the ages of 5 and 7: ride a two-wheel bike, bounce and catch a ball, dribble a ball, hit a ball off a tee, do a chin up, run a 35-yard dash in 10 seconds or less, skip, do a few bent-knee sit-ups and jump rope.

Recommended activities for these children include bicycling, dance, gymnastics, fitness trails and playground activities, karate, skating, swimming, tee-ball and tennis.

Keep in mind these are general guidelines and each child, even in the same family, will have different abilities and interests.

So how is Matt doing in T-ball? Just fine. He’s the only kid on his team who can accurately complete a throw from third to first base and can vary his batting stance to hit the ball where he needs to for maximum effect. He’s made the all-star team both years that he played. And it’s nice to hear at any hour of the waking day, “Daddy, can we play some catch?”

He’s taken great interest in the sport and in physical activities as a whole. Television and video games have their place, but not to the point of excess.

(Witkowski is an action officer with the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Personnel Support, Families and Education.)

Sports Shorts

Men’s varsity try-outs

Tryouts for the men’s varsity basketball team are 3 p.m. Saturday and Sunday and 4:30 p.m. Nov. 10-15. Tryouts are open to all active-duty military, dependents and DoD civilians. For more information, call Ext. 3607.

Singles swim party

The swimming pool staff is sponsoring a dorm residents and singles swim party from 9 - 11 p.m. Nov. 14. The \$5 cover charge includes hamburgers, hot dogs, sandwiches, fruit, soda juice and chips. For more information, call Ext. 2815.

Youth basketball

Youth basketball registration is from 7:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m. Mondays through Fridays at the youth center. Children ages 6 - 18 are eligible. Camps and clinics will run during the Christmas school break, and the season begins around Jan. 5, 1998. Coaches are needed. For more information, call Karl Pfor on Ext. 3735.

200-mile challenge

The swimming pool staff congratulates the following swimmers for completing their 200

miles in the pool: Maureen “Mo” Galpin, Trudy Kozora, Gary Hargrove and Martha Stanton. For more information on how to do the 200-mile challenge, call Ext. 2815.

Colourama

The next Colourama bowling tournament is Saturday. The cost is \$15 per bowler and the fun begins at 7:30 p.m. There will be prizes and jackpots and a turkey shoot with a chance to win a turkey for Thanksgiving. For details, call Ext. 2108.

Bowling fees

Liberty Lanes will increase fees beginning Nov. 17. For a listing of the changes, please stop by the bowling center or call Ext. 2108.

Climbing at the youth center

The youth center offers climbing classes for the “Radical Rock” from 5:30 - 6:30 p.m. Tuesdays. The cost is \$3 per session. Open climbing is from 5:30 - 9 p.m. Thursdays and is available for those who have been through four climbing classes. The cost is \$3 per

session. To sign up for classes or open climbing, call Ext. 3180.

Golf course specials

The golf course is running two specials. The first is a five-round punch card. The cost is \$32 for E-1s to E-4s and \$40 for E-5s and up. The second special is a beginner’s package. For \$79.95, a beginner gets: three lessons, three rounds of golf, three rounds of club rentals, 10 buckets of range balls and \$20 off a set of clubs, if purchased. For more information, call Ext. 2223.

Tae Kwon Do

The Shepherd’s Grove Community Activities Center now has spaces available in its Tae Kwon Do classes. Classes are 7 p.m. Wednesdays and 7:30 p.m. Fridays. Classes are available for children and adults. For more information, call (01359) 250269.

Skating rink

The skating rink staff books birthday parties during regular skating sessions. The staff provides games and prizes for party members. To reserve your date, call Ext. 1627.